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Digital Justice: An Exploratory Study of Digital Activism Actions on Twitter

Damien Sánchez
University of New Mexico

Abstract: *This paper employs learning analytics to determine the relationships between digital activism action categories. Organizing that took place on Twitter in response to the shooting death of Tony Robinson, an African American teenager, was guided by the digital activism typology developed by Penney and Dadas (2014). The results yielded a positive correlation between seeking connections with activists and providing face-to-face updates from protests, which suggests people who seek connections with activists are likely to participate in live protests. Forwarding Information and Facilitating Online Actions were found to be negatively correlated with all other study variables. These findings lead to the conclusion that the common definitions of an Activist and Slacktivist are insufficient to describe Online Activism because Facilitating Online Actions requires a unique level of engagement as compared to participating in face-to-face protests or sharing information online. People who facilitate online actions should be treated as a unique population among digital activists because of their unique level of online engagement.*

Keywords: learning analytics, digital activism, sentiment analysis, Twitter

1. Introduction

On the night of March 6, 2015 Madison, Wisconsin police officer Matt Kenny was called to a civil disturbance being caused by 19-year-old African American teenager, Tony Robinson. Ultimately the encounter ended with Officer Kenny shooting and killing the unarmed teenager. Public outcry was immediate and news of Tony Robinson's

death spread quickly on the national news and social media (Simon, 2015). Protests started immediately following Robinson's death as people demanded justice for Tony. Many similar events have been happening across the United States starting in 2012 with the shooting death of 17-year-old African American Trayvon Martin in Florida (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). African Americans are being brutalized by law enforcement officers across the country and public outcry is starting to be

a predicable reaction to these travesties.

Activists are using social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as an organizing tool to facilitate protests and other related activities associated with many instances of police brutality. What was once a face-to-face activity has been taken online, giving birth to digital activism. Digital activism, as defined by Whyte (2010), is “The practice of using digital technology to increase the effectiveness of a social or political change campaign” (p. 218). The change campaign that this study investigates is #BlackLivesMatter. This movement was started in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin (Organization, 2015). The purpose of #BlackLivesMatter includes calling attention to police brutality but encompasses all ways in which African Americans have been disempowered. Since establishing #BlackLivesMatter in 2012, an ever-growing network of activists and sympathizers has contributed millions of Tweets to the discussion of African American disempowerment.

Although vibrant networks like #BlackLivesMatter were created and are maintained mostly online, little research has investigated the dynamics of these communities in their native online setting such as Twitter. Zhang (2013) examined how youth in Singapore use a wide variety of information and communication technologies like Facebook, Twitter, and Google Docs to engage in digital activism while Harlow and Guo (2014) studied how digital media is transforming the very definition of an activist. Although these articles speak to the recognition of digital activism as a distinct research area, they fail to capture the true dynamics of digital activism because both utilize a qualitative face-to-face methodology. These studies, and others like them, fail to

use Tweets produced by community members as part of their analysis. Several studies have used NodeXL to analyze Tweets (Carew, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012) but these studies are few and far between.

Analytics provides researchers with the tools needed to conduct meaningful research in online networks like #BlackLivesMatter. Analytics, which combines large data sets, statistical techniques, and predictive modeling, is currently most often utilized in education to help support administrative decision-makers (Campbell, DeBlois, & Oblinger, 2007, July/August). Many different types of analytics exist including academic analytics, learning analytics (Long & Siemens, 2011), and Social Learning Analytics (Buckingham Shum & Ferguson, 2012). The current study employs Social Learning Analytics, which is defined by Buckingham Shum and Ferguson (2012) as a “distinctive subset of learning analytics that draws on the substantial body of work demonstrating that new skills and ideas are not solely individual achievements, but are developed, carried forward, and passed on through interaction and collaboration” (p. 5). This definition is important because in networks focused on facilitating both online and face-to-face activities like #BlackLivesMatter, interaction and collaboration that result in information sharing is essential to the existence of the network. As mentioned by Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles, and Larson (2004), “the very structure of the Web, which lends itself to the kinds of informational, analytical, and organizational strategies on which activism depends, has become a fundamental component of many social action projects” (p. 88). The aim of this exploratory study is to use Social Learning Analytics to determine the types of information that are shared most frequently as people participate in digital activism and to identify the relationships between the types of

information people share.

2. Literature Review

In order to understand the types of digital activism information, it is necessary to break down digital activism into its requisite parts in light of #BlackLivesMatter. This section starts by providing basic information about Twitter functionality. Digital activism is then explained in terms of information sharing, network building, and facilitating action. Information sharing is revealed as a cornerstone of digital activism by looking at Social Constructivist Theory and Social Network Theory because #BlackLivesMatter is comprised of a complex network of individuals dialoguing about disempowerment. The factors associated with transitioning this dialog into action is presented next. Having established that digital activism within #BlackLivesMatter involves social learning about the African American community's disempowerment and how this dialogue results in action, the focus turns to an exploration of the specific factors associated with digital activism.

2.1. Twitter

Twitter is being used more and more by activists to share information, coordinate activities, and organize movements during an event (Cullum, 2010). Twitter is a social media tool that allows users to send single messages, called Tweets, to people within their networks. Note that there is no limit to the number of Tweets a user can send; only a limit of 140 characters to the length of each Tweet. Once a user has created a Tweet, users can take a variety of actions to share the information. Twitter (2016) offers the following definitions of its information sharing features:

- Reply - A response to another user's Tweet that begins with the @username of

the person you're replying to is known as a reply.

- Retweet - A Tweet that you forward to your followers is known as a Retweet. Often used to pass along news or other valuable discoveries on Twitter, Retweets always retain original attribution.
- Hashtags - A hashtag is any word or phrase immediately preceded by the # symbol. When you click on a hashtag, you'll see other Tweets containing the same keyword or topic.

In this study, hashtags will be used to identify relevant content. Retweets will be used to identify what types of information are shared the most. Further details are provided in the Methods section.

2.2. Social Constructivist Theory

Social Constructivist Theory, including the Zone of Proximal Development, establishes the vital role socialization plays in the learning process; specifically, a novice learns much more with expert assistance than the novice could without assistance (Vygotsky, 1978). The #BlackLivesMatter movement provides a venue for experts and novices to dialogue about the disempowerment of African Americans (Organization, 2015). It must not be overlooked that the dialog within #BlackLivesMatter is situated in reality as people discuss events and opinions related to their lived experiences. The nature of this discussion aligns well with the idea that learning situated in real social situations produces meaningful learning, ultimately resulting in an understanding of how an individual is related to the welfare of the group to which he or she belongs (Dewey, 1897). In this case, African Americans participating within the #BlackLivesMatter movement are forming an understanding of their individual

role in light of the larger African American community. Social learning is occurring within #BlackLivesMatter, which means that information sharing is a cornerstone of the network. Based on their common interests, #BlackLivesMatter has brought together groups of geographically dispersed people to form one powerful network. 2.3. Measurement of Constructs

2.3. Social Network Theory

Social Network Theory helps to explain how such a diverse group of people can become united as well as how the network functions. Social Network Theory describes the nature of the relationships between actors, such as individuals who are part of #BlackLivesMatter, as they exchange resources, such as information regarding disempowerment (Haythornthwaite, 1996). Contributors to #BlackLivesMatter create large networks of dispersed users who are learning and acting in response to oppressive actions perpetrated against the African American community. Interaction between contributors is enabled by Twitter's Retweet function. When a user Retweets content, it is shared with his or her entire network and each member of the network can also Retweet the content to his or her network. Bruns and Burgess (2012) noted the potentially endless cycle of Retweets allows information to reach wide audiences. The #BlackLivesMatter movement is sustained by interactions between contributors regarding the nature of their disempowerment.

Social Network Theory not only contributes to the understanding of how the network sustains itself, it also offers insight into how contributors interact with one another. Of specific importance is that weak ties facilitate the search for knowledge while strong ties are best for communicating

complex knowledge (Hansen, 1999). Weak ties are those characterized by infrequent communication while strong ties are characterized by frequent communication (Levin & Cross, 2004). In a network as large as #BlackLivesMatter, weak ties are almost certainly the most common. Finding information that is meaningful to an individual's own context is of the utmost importance. For many users, Twitter can be seen as a new technology. As discovered by Yang, Lu, Gupta, Cao, and Zhang (2012), finding something personally useful is an important factor in determining whether new technology will be adopted. Thus, the ability of users to find relevant information is vital to sustaining and expanding the network. Social Network Theory explains sharing behaviors that sustain the #BlackLivesMatter movement and characterizes the nature of the relationships between individuals in the network. However, Tweet content must also be examined to understand the network more completely.

2.4. Freedom from Oppression

By engaging in dialogue regarding the disempowerment of African Americans, #BlackLivesMatter contributors have an opportunity to understand their individual roles in light of the larger phenomenon of the oppression of African Americans. Freire (1970) defines oppression as, "Any situation in which "A" objectively exploits "B" or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression" (p. 55). The African American community is an example of an oppressed people as the realities of racism, classism, and racial stereotyping, to name a few, have become accepted realities of life as an African American. These negative phenomena have led to their collective disempowerment. However, when an oppressed people start to engage in

sustained dialogue about the circumstances of their oppression, like in the case of #BlackLivesMatter, the oppressed start to understand the nature of their oppression and they often take action to initiate change (Freire, 1970). It is evident that action is the natural outcome of the conscious information sharing among members of the #BlackLivesMatter network. #BlackLivesMatter provides the venue for critical dialogue to take place and digital activism provides the vehicle for that dialogue to result in meaningful action.

2.5. Digital Activism

Digital activism is a powerful organizing tool that has been used across the world to help successfully organize people in efforts to facilitate social change. One example is the overthrow of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, which is described by Brym, Godbout, Hoffbauer, Menard, and Zhang (2014) as a demonstration of how social media has become a key component of the ways in which activists shape social movements. In Egypt, social media was instrumental in sharing information and helping to organize large protests (Lim, 2012). A well-known example of digital activism in the United States is the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement. This largely online movement used Twitter, along with Facebook and YouTube, to successfully urge thousands of people to protest in Zuccotti Park, New York and share updates from the protests (Juris, 2012). These two movements share similar characteristics in that both used social media to share information and to organize people to participate in face-to-face actions. While these similarities reveal some potential in ascertaining how social media is used by social movements, additional study is necessary to reveal how digital activism utilizes social media. To create such an understanding, several studies are compared

to identify additional activities associated with digital activism and to develop typologies for understanding the use of social media in the context of digital activism.

The first study considered is a report summarizing how to engage youth in online civic engagement (Montgomery et al., 2004). The second study is a qualitative study investigating nonprofit use of Twitter (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). The final study is another qualitative study investigating the use of Twitter by the Occupy Wall Street movement (Penney & Dadas, 2014). Table 1 compares the digital activism typologies in each study.

Common elements between the typologies presented in Table 1 include adherence to the general elements of digital activism (information sharing, network building, and facilitating action) described previously in this section. Similarly, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) used Information, Community, and Action as general categories to classify the host of activities in their study of nonprofit use of Twitter. The general elements of digital activism can also be used to classify the activities identified in the work of Montgomery et al. (2004) and Penney and Dadas (2014). The similarities between these typologies are interesting to note given the unique motivation behind each of the studies. Table 1 compares an institutional report summarizing online youth civic engagement Montgomery et al. (2004), a chronicle of nonprofit business implementations (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), and a specific examination of a grassroots organizing effort (Penney & Dadas, 2014). The similarity between the general elements of digital activism presented in this paper and the work of Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) in addition to the convergence of activities in the typologies presented in Table 1 provide a high degree of confidence that information sharing, network building, and facilitating action capture the breadth of

the activities associated with digital activism. Given the grassroots context of this study, the digital activism activities identified by Penney and Dadas (2014) were selected to guide the analysis. Definitions of each of these key digital activism action categories, according to Penney and Dadas (2014), are provided below according to their relationship to the general elements of digital activism:

1) Information Sharing

- Forwarding news via links and Retweets: Original or Retweeted messages

containing links to outside news sources or pertinent information

- Live reporting from face-to-face protests: Messages containing live updates which can include photos, videos, or other multimedia

2) Network Building

- Expressing personal opinions regarding the movement: Messages containing personal opinions or views about aspects of the movement including commentary on larger social and political issues

Table 1. Digital Activism Typologies

<i>Montgomery et al. (2004)</i>	<i>Lovejoy and Saxton (2012)</i>	<i>Penney and Dadas (2014)</i>
Organizing and recruiting	Information	Facilitating face to face protests via advertisements and donation solicitations
Publication and distribution of materials	Getting recognition and thanks	Live reporting from face-to-face protests
Alternative news source	Acknowledgment of current and local events	Forwarding news via links and Retweets
Orchestration and coordination of demonstrations, lobbying, and direct action	Responses to reply messages	Expressing personal opinions regarding the movement
Press relations	Response solicitation	Engaging in discussion about the movement
Viral marketing	Promoting an event	Making personal connections with fellow activists
Fundraising	Donation appeal	Facilitating online-based actions
	Selling a product	
	Call for volunteers and employees	
	Lobbying and advocacy	
	Join another site or coach for organization	
	Learn how to help	

- Engaging in discussion about the movement: Messages containing positive or negative comments of a political or social nature regarding the purpose of the movement
- Making personal connections with fellow Activists: Messages containing gestures of solidarity or attempts to reach out to others with the intent of doing something either online or face-to-face

3) Facilitating Action

- Facilitating online-based actions: Messages containing directives or information that is intended to result in only online activities
- Facilitating face-to-face protests via advertisements and donation solicitations: Messages containing time and date information that are intended to increase attendance of face-to-face events. Note that advertisements and donation solicitations were not part of this dataset so these terms will be removed.

The typologies in Table 1 identify associated activities but they do not mention the frequency with which the activities they identified are disseminated within Twitter via Retweets. Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) reported the overall totals and percentages according to their typology of nonprofit Twitter uses but this simple frequency only identifies the most common activity. Reporting the frequencies of activities according to Retweets will shed light on how information traverses the network and constitutes a contribution to the existing research. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ1: What categories of Tweets are most often shared within Twitter?

The aforementioned studies suggest that the actions listed in their typologies are related in that they were part of their dataset. In fact, Penney and Dadas (2014) stated that the categories they identified are overlapping in nature. Qualitative research is well suited to inductively identifying categories of information, which each of these studies does well. However, qualitative methods are not capable of assessing whether relationships exist between the identified activities. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ2: What are the relationships between the digital activism action categories?

3. Data analysis procedures

3.1. Subjects

The subjects for the study consist of 10,296 unique users who produced 15,740 Tweets. #BlackLivesMatter depended heavily upon the engagement of high school students from Madison, Wisconsin to organize protests in response to the death of Tony Robinson. Other contributors include activists associated with organizations such as #BlackLivesMatter and Occupy Wall Street. Note that the presence of these groups was indicated by Tweets originating from their organizational accounts within the primary hashtags searched. Still others included in the data set were concerned Madison community members and interested parties from across the globe. Note that most of the users were located in the United States. Group affiliations were determined based on Tweet content and no specific demographics were collected.

3.2. Apparatus

Data collection and analysis were performed using the Organization, Information, and Learning Sciences (OILS) Twitter Scraper. Generally speaking, scraping involves the collection of online data from social media and other online sources in the form of unstructured text (Batinca & Treleven, 2015). The main purpose of the OILS Twitter Scraper is to gather and analyze Twitter data. The software was written in Visual Basic by Dr. Nick V. Flor of the University of New Mexico (Flor, 2014). The software uses applicable functions from the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) to pull Tweets off of Twitter into an Excel spreadsheet. The software uses the same search string syntax used by Twitter when searching for specific Tweets via the Twitter website to limit the data pulled into Excel. Raw data such as date, username, Favorites count, Retweet count, Tweet content, and total Tweet count are included in the data scrapes. The software has similar functionality to quantitative analysis programs, such as SAS or SPSS, as it can run correlations, produce covariance matrices, and conduct other

standard statistical analyses.

3.3. Procedure

Tweets were scraped using a search string focused on Tweets mentioning both #BlackLivesMatter and #TonyRobinson from March 7 – March 10, 2015. Prior to Tony Robinson's death on the evening of March 6, hashtags associated with him did not exist. Figure 1 presents Tweet counts associated with each day included in the data set. The explosions in Tweet counts are associated with face-to-face protests on March 7 and March 9. After March 10, Twitter activity associated with Tony Robinson decreases dramatically. The low Tweet count continued after March 10, which combined with a lack of face-to-face protests after the 10th, contributed to the decision to make March 10 the final day included in the data set.

The analysis of Tweets scraped from #BlackLivesMatter and #TonyRobinson is

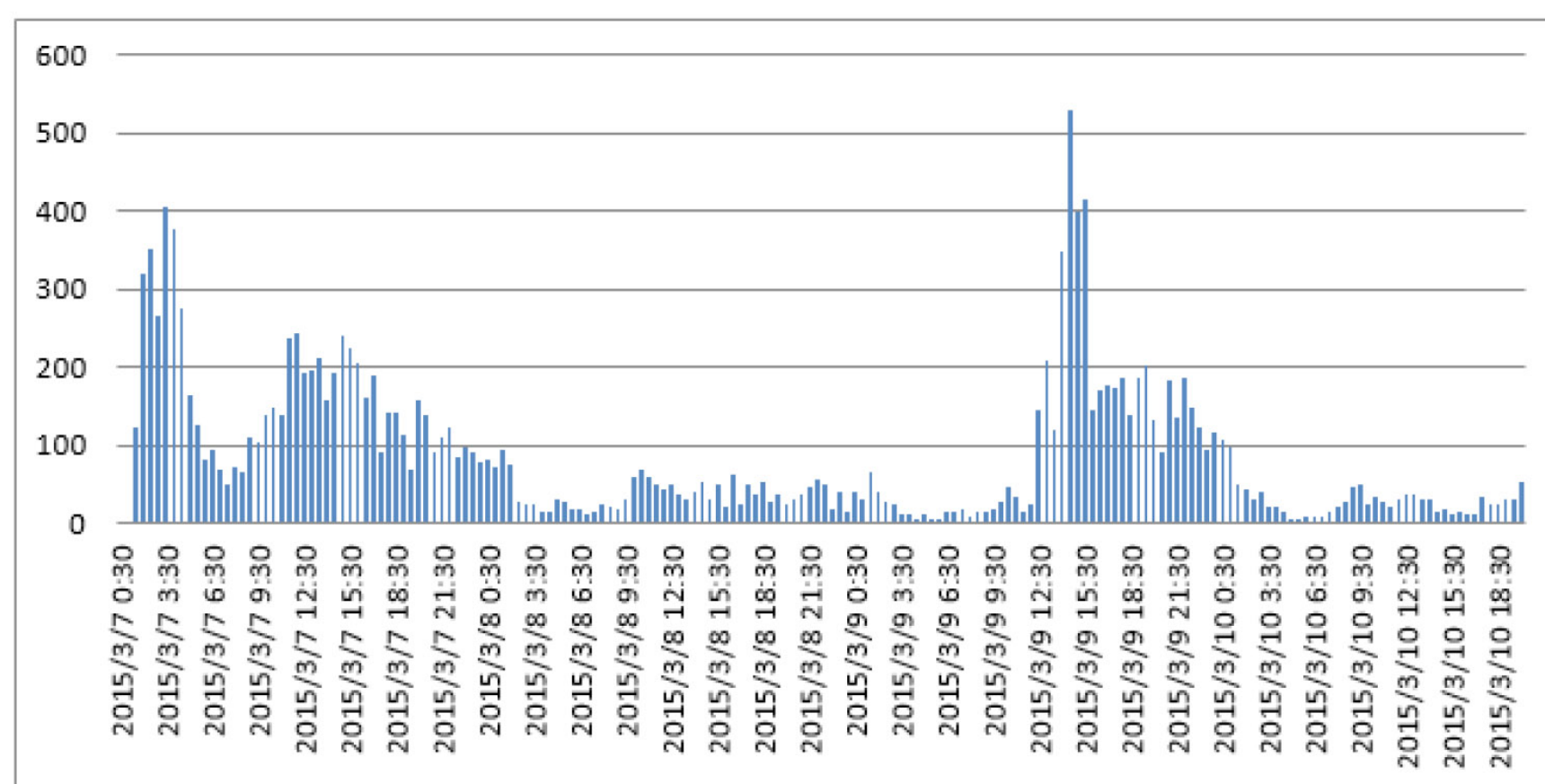


Figure 1. Tweet Frequency Histogram.

based on the typology of seven Twitter actions developed by Penney and Dadas (2014). In order to operationalize these categories, the definitions provided in the Literature Review were used to conduct a sentiment analysis of the scraped Tweets. Sentiment analysis is defined by Batrinca and Treleaven (2015) as “the application of natural language processing, computational linguistics and text analytics to identify and extract subjective information in source materials” (p. 90). Sentiment analysis was implemented in this study following the work of Hu and Liu (2004). The majority of the work associated with the sentiment analysis was conducted manually by reading through the individual Tweets. Samples of keywords identified during the sentiment analysis are presented below according to the Penney and Dadas (2014) action categories.

- **Personal Opinions:** “i think”, “thoughts and prayers”, “murder”, “profit”, “anguish”, “ironic”, “assaulted”, “black-on-black”, “black half”, “fear”, “disgusting”, “savage”, “killer cops”, “i’m”, “pigs”, “media”, “saddened”, “angry”, “rest in power”, “white supremacy”, “slavemaster”, “equality”, “rabid”, “shit”, “slain”, “racist”, “liberalism”, “99%”, “practice”, “exaggerating”, “practice”, “devastated”
- **Discussion:** “mugshot”, “pic”, “racial”, “issues”, “racial”, “dane county”, “sentence”, “friend”, “heart if full”, “life and death”, “that proud”, “proud”, “not associating”
- **Connect Activists:** “#shutitdown”, “#willystreet”, “tamir”, “our hands are still up”, “on the move”, “love”, “solidarity”, “fight”, “respect”, “bucks”, “support”, “list”, “live”, “stand”, “muslims”, “raising up”, “goodluck”
- **Forward Information:** “19”, “image”, “media”, “unarmed”, “die”, “officer”, “police”, “kill”, “die”, “5 times”, “http”, “home”, “video”, “kill”, “meet officer”, “thousands”, “images/video”, “conference”, “corinda”, “walk-out”, “today in”, “new song”, “yesterday”
- **Online Actions:** “RT”, “tweet”, “trend”, “hashtag”, “share”, “sharing”, “viral”, “#anthonyhill”, “urge”, “join”, “protest page”
- **Coordinate Face-to-face Updates:** “singing”, “what do we want”, “livestream”, “de facto segregation”, “aunt and grandma”, “lots of people”, “updated coverage”, “crowd continues”, “site”, “video of fam”, “gather”, “street”, “streets”, “brusky”, “williamson”, “willy”, “scene”, “few”, “sign”, “red gym”, “vigil”, “mansion”
- **Facilitate Face-to-Face Actions:** “red gym”, “join now”, “come to”, “week of action”, “tonite”, “ewash”, “willy st”, “willy and few”, “headed to madison”, “walkout”, “walk out”, “10:30”, “vigil”, “urge action”, “211”, “carroll”, “capitol”, “capital”, “11:15”, “@ygbcoalition”, “langdon”, “1030”, “bascom”

Upon completion of the sentiment analysis, the OILS Twitter Scraper was used to determine whether individual Tweets were associated with the digital activism action categories by producing count data for each Tweet according to the action category keywords. Next, the filtering capability in Excel was used to find the Tweets that were not associated with any of the seven action categories. Modifications to the existing category arrays were made by adding or removing keywords to assure all Tweets fit into at least one of the seven action categories. Once the list of keywords associated with

each category was complete, the OILS Twitter Scraper was run again to assure correct Tweet action category association counts. Several statistical techniques, described in the next section, were then used to answer the research questions.

4. Results

RQ1: What categories of Tweets are most often shared within Twitter?

In order to determine which Tweet categories were most often shared, the raw data collected by the OILS Twitter Scraper was sorted from largest to smallest number of Retweets. Duplicate Tweets were removed using built-in functionality in Excel. In total, 12,397 Retweets were removed, leaving 3,344 unique Tweets. What remained were the original Tweets as well as their Retweets. Original Tweets were removed from the remaining data by filtering the Tweets according to the text string “RT*” since Twitter includes “RT” at the beginning of any Retweet. A total of 1,057 Tweets remained after applying this text filter. Finally, the number of Retweets for the remaining Tweets was summed to produce final numbers of Retweets according to each of the seven categories. Results are shown in Table 2.

The Connect Activists and Forward Information categories unexpectedly produced the highest number of Retweets. Expected results include the numbers associated with Personal Opinions, Face-to-Face

Updates, and Facilitate Face-to-Face Action. Identifying these categories was facilitated by the language of the tweets and associated multimedia. The clear presence of these categories created the expectation that many instances would occur. The frequency of Online Actions Retweets was much lower than expected, as research conducted by Bonilla and Rosa (2015) indicated a high level of Online Actions within the #Blacklivesmatter network. In this case, the #BlackLivesMatter network was more concerned with face-to-face activities than with digital forms of protest. Finally, the Discussion category had the lowest number of Retweets, which was an expected finding because initial posts are Retweeted while subsequent discussion takes place in threaded discussions within Tweets.

RQ2: What are the relationships between the digital activism action categories?

A correlation matrix was produced to identify relationships between digital activism categories. To produce these correlations, the count values associated with each of the categories, as produced by the OILS Twitter Scraper, were consolidated on a single spreadsheet. The correlation matrix is presented in Table 3.

All of the relationships tested were found to be significant. Personal Opinions was found to be positively correlated with Discussion ($p < .0000001$, $r = .093$) and providing Face-to-Face Updates ($p < .0000001$, $r = .081$). The positive correlation with Face-to-Face Updates

Table 2. Total Retweets

<i>Personal Opinions</i>	<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Connect Activists</i>	<i>Forward Info</i>	<i>Online Actions</i>	<i>F2F Updates</i>	<i>Facilitate F2F</i>
2,042	631	14,881	13,091	736	4,234	2,752

Table 3. Digital Activism Actions Correlation Matrix

	<i>Personal Opinions</i>	<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Connect Activists</i>	<i>Forward Info</i>	<i>Online Actions</i>	<i>F2F Updates</i>	<i>Facilitate F2F</i>
<i>Personal Opinions</i>	1.000						
<i>Discussion</i>	0.093*	1.000					
<i>Connect Activists</i>	-0.024**	0.113*	1.000				
<i>Forward Info</i>	-0.128*	-0.152*	-0.209*	1.000			
<i>Online Actions</i>	-0.025**	-0.039**	-0.051*	-0.181*	1.000		
<i>F2F Updates</i>	0.081*	-0.088*	0.071*	-0.296*	-0.060*	1.000	
<i>Facilitate F2F</i>	-0.109*	-0.075*	-0.026**	-0.199*	-0.076*	0.204*	1.000

Notes: * $p < .0000001$; ** $p < .001$

is surprising but plausible because people who are providing Face-to-Face Updates also often communicate positive or negative opinions about the events. Personal Opinions was found to be negatively correlated with Forwarding Information ($p < .001$, $r = -.128$), suggesting that those who Retweet information do not include any personal commentary. Discussion was found to be positively correlated with Connecting Activists ($p < .0000001$, $r = .113$). Similar to the negative correlation found between Personal Opinions and Forwarding Information, Discussion was also negatively correlated with Forwarding Information ($p < .001$, $r = -.152$). Negative correlations between Personal Opinions and Discussion with Forwarding Information suggest that Forwarding Information is a passive behavior. Connecting Activists was found to be positively correlated with Face-to-Face Updates ($p < .0000001$, $r = .071$). A negative correlation exists between Connecting Activists and Forwarding Information ($p < .0000001$, $r = -.209$), suggesting that

Retweeting does not necessarily bring individuals within the network closer together. Forwarding Information was found to be negatively correlated with all study variables. It is interesting to note that there was not a positive relationship between Forwarding Information and Online Actions since both are primarily online activities. Online Actions was also found to be negatively correlated with all study variables. Finally, Face-to-Face Updates was found to be positively correlated with Facilitating Face-to-Face Actions ($p < .0000001$, $r = .204$). This relationship makes sense since someone who participates in face-to-face protests would also be likely to provide updates from those events. Table 4 presents the R² values for each of the correlations:

On an individual basis, the relationships between the categories do not account for a large percentage of the variation. Therefore, the model presented is not able to effectively predict future behaviors. The variation from person-to-person and community-to-

Table 4. R2 Values for Digital Activism Correlations

	<i>Personal Opinions</i>	<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Connect Activists</i>	<i>Forward Info</i>	<i>Online Actions</i>	<i>F2F Updates</i>	<i>Facilitate F2F</i>
<i>Personal Opinions</i>	1.000						
<i>Discussion</i>	0.009	1.000					
<i>Connect Activists</i>	0.001	0.013	1.000				
<i>Forward Info</i>	0.016	0.023	0.044	1.000			
<i>Online Actions</i>	0.001	0.002	0.003	0.033	1.000		
<i>F2F Updates</i>	0.007	0.008	0.005	0.088	0.004	1.000	
<i>Facilitate F2F</i>	0.012	0.006	0.001	0.039	0.006	0.042	1.000

community who participate in digital activism on Twitter is likely a factor in the inability of this model to predict outcomes effectively.

5. Discussion

The high Retweet frequency of the Connect Activists and Forward Information categories indicates that members of the #BlackLivesMatter network are well connected, amply informed, and value an individual's presence at a protest as a factor in determining whether their Tweets will be widely disseminated. Tweets within the Personal Opinion and Discussion categories reflected both supportive and critical points of view. Connecting Activists was positively correlated with Face-to-Face Updates, which hints at the vital role people who Tweet from protests have in building and maintaining the network. Forwarding Information was not positively correlated with any of the other study variables, which might mean that this activity constitutes the simplest and least engaged form of digital activism. Online Actions was also negatively correlated with

the other study variables. However, engaging in online actions requires much more commitment and engagement than forwarding information. This suggests engaging in online actions is a unique type of digital activism. The categories associated with face-to-face actions constitute the highest level of engagement associated with digital activism and are positively correlated with one another.

5.1. Retweet Frequency

According to Morozov (2013), it is extremely difficult for digital activist networks to facilitate meaningful face-to-face action. However, the extremely high number of Retweets in the Connect Activists category suggests that there is a great level of interconnectedness between individuals within the #BlackLivesMatter network. In addition, the high number of Retweets in the Forwarding Information category indicates that these well connected individuals are also well informed. Although there is no formal organization to the #BlackLivesMatter network, the maxim of Twitter content production described by

Hands (2011) holds true. She says that 90% of Twitter content is created by 10% of its users (p. 119). Indeed, a relatively small number of #BlackLivesMatter users produced a great volume of the content. These individuals have no obvious relationship to an organization that would increase their influence in the eyes of the network. The study by Xu, Sang, Blasiola, and Park (2014) suggested how content becomes influential. Tweets considered more engaging were more likely to be Retweeted than non-engaging Tweets. In the current study, it seems as though engaging means someone who attended a protest and Tweeted some form of live update as evidenced by the individuals associated with the Face-to-Face Updates and Facilitate Face-to-face Activities categories producing the most Retweeted content.

5.2. Expressing Personal Opinions Regarding the Movement

The current study found that expressing personal opinions was a strong trend. Prior digital activism research has shown that people often use social media to express their personal opinions regarding a movement (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Brym et al., 2014; Lim, 2012; Weiss, 2014; Zhang, 2013). The current study contributes the positive correlation between Discussion and Face-to-Face Updates with Personal Opinions. Sharing information is the foundation of discussion so the relationship between these variables is expected. Both supporters and critics were sharing their personal opinions. Sample Tweets that exemplify the positive and negative sentiments expressed are provided below.

- **Supportive Sample:** Another black child murdered by police. This s*** is genocide. #TonyRobinson #BlackLivesMatter
- **Critical Sample:** #TonyRobinson was

the best that the black community has to offer. No wonder they all end up in jail. #BlackLivesMatter #justice4tony

The Supportive Sample communicates that it is unjust how many African American children are being killed by police. The Critical Sample is a reflection of racism towards the entire African American community, which infers that all African Americans are delinquents. Research conducted by Carew (2014) in South Africa examining the trends associated with the rhinoceros conservation campaign #Iam4rhinos also found many charged personal opinions. Critical Tweets in her study were from supporters of rhinoceros conservation who expressed anger towards poachers. However, Tweets that were contrary to the purpose of the movement were not present. The dichotomy between supportive and critical Tweets carries over into the Discussion category.

5.3. Engaging in Discussion about the Movement

The current study found that supportive and critical discussion took place within the #BlackLivesMatter network. Samples of each type of discussion Tweet are provided below.

- **Supportive Sample:** “He changed me as a person.” Friends of #TonyRobinson #justice4tony #BlackLivesMatter <http://t.co/YRuCW0kR5n>
- **Critical Sample:** The media and #BlackLivesMatter dopes want you to see #TonyRobinson’s pic on the left, not his mugshot on the right ht...

Note that the Supportive Sample provided is a quote from one of Tony Robinson’s friends. The link in the Tweet will display the video that originated the quote. Numerous studies have found that social media is used

to carry on a discussion about a specific movement (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Carew, 2014; Harlow & Guo, 2014; Juris, 2012; Lim, 2012). The current study extends these findings by adding that Discussion is positively correlated with Connecting Activists and negatively correlated with Forwarding Information. Discussion is the act of sharing personal opinions regarding a given subject so finding that Discussion is negatively correlated with Forwarding Information, which was operationalized as sharing factual information without interjecting a personal point of view, is no surprise.

Support for the relationship between Discussion and Connecting Activists comes from the work of Weiss (2014) who found that Malaysians prefer to maintain online personal journals to share their own opinions about political issues. The intent of these journals is to connect activists as they discuss issues and get people interested in attending face-to-face events. Zhang (2013) also found that social media is used mostly in the context of discussing events and raising awareness about social issues more than it is used as a formal organizing tool by youth in Singapore. Sharing information about a cause brings like-minded individuals together, but willingness to go offline is often lacking. Indeed, both of these studies indicate that the mostly discussion-oriented nature of the activist networks studied do not often result in high levels of participation in face-to-face events.

5.4. Making Personal Connections with Fellow Activists

The current study supports previous findings which indicate that activists make connections with other likeminded individuals using social media (Harlow & Guo, 2014; Juris, 2012; Lim, 2012). Samples of Tweets sent by an organization and an individual are

provided below.

- **Organization Sample:** RT @OccupyWallStNYC: All our love and solidarity to the friends and family of #TonyRobinson. #BlackLivesMatter
- **Individual Sample:** Made a list of people tweeting from #justice4tony events in Madison <https://t.co/28I2pnS9vE> #TonyRobinson

Note that the Organization Sample was sent by the account linked to the Occupy Wall Street movement. The study conducted by Brym et al. (2014) helps to explain how networks of activists form. Brym et al. (2014) indicated that social media played a significant role in extending protest networks, which facilitated the Egyptian uprising. They also found common traits of activists, such as organizational ties and feeling slighted by society, were easily identified online. The ease of identifying like-minded individuals helped build a large support base for the movement in a short amount of time. It is highly likely that the majority of #BlackLivesMatter contributors feel slighted by society since African Americans have a long history of oppression. Xu et al. (2014) noted that Twitter allows users to easily filter and deliver customized information. These features help people locate like-minded individuals. Therefore, gravitating towards a common experience of oppression has likely contributed to the growing strength of the #BlackLivesMatter network.

The current study extends existing research finding that Making Personal Connections with Activists is positively correlated with Face-to-Face Updates and negatively correlated with every other study variable. The relationship between Making Personal Connections with Activists and Face-to-Face Updates suggests that people

who attempt to make connections with other activists online are also likely to participate in face-to-face events. Further research is necessary to substantiate this claim.

5.5. Forwarding News Via Links and Retweets

The current study found that information was forwarded among users within #BlackLivesMatter via Tweets and Retweets. Previous research has established that Twitter, along with other forms of social media, have been used by those in digital activist networks as a news source (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Brym et al., 2014; Lim, 2012; Weiss, 2014; Zhang, 2013). Specifically, Brym et al. (2014) noted how protesters in Egypt relied mostly on social media for news related to protests. Examples of news disseminated within #BlackLivesMatter are as follows.

#TonyRobinson 19 years old. Unarmed. Black. Man. Killed Madison, WI's PD. 3/6/2015 at 6:30pm. #BlackLivesMatter

Wisconsin police confirm #TonyRobinson was unarmed: <http://t.co/5c9j6E4w1U> #BlackLivesMatter <http://t.co/F8NTfUxBZq>

The current study found that Forwarding Information was negatively correlated with all of the other study variables. Perhaps these negative correlations indicate that people who Forward Information are unlikely to participate in activism of any kind. A study of advocates for Mexican immigrants in the United States conducted by Harlow and Guo (2014) found that many advocates who participate in digital activism networks do not engage in face-to-face demonstrations. Two studies discussed in an earlier section also point out the difficulty associated with getting digital activists to participate in live events (Weiss, 2014; Zhang, 2013). Existing research, as well as the negative correlations, suggest that Forwarding

Information is associated with people who are not likely to engage in live protests.

5.6. Facilitating Online-Based Actions

The other study variable negatively correlated with all of the other study variables is Facilitating Online-Based Actions, which suggests this activity might be related to another aspect of digital activism not been identified in previous research. Sample Tweets associated with this study variable are as follows.

Make this viral please <https://t.co/5xzJZAmvxd> @aclu @hrw @civilrights #Ferguson to #Madison #BlackLivesMatter #IcantBreathe

We started our day dope, tweeting #BlackOutDay, sadly we're ending our night tweeting #BlackLivesMatter because a cop kil...

Previous research has established that in other networks members have used online actions to serve as a form of digital protest (Brym et al., 2014; Harlow & Guo, 2014; Lim, 2012; Montgomery et al., 2004). Bonilla and Rosa (2015), who studied digital activism in #Ferguson, are especially relevant because their work provides examples of the level of engagement required when Facilitating Online Action. The ethnography by Bonilla and Rosa (2015) determined that once news of the Ferguson, Missouri police killing an unarmed African American teenager named Michael Brown hit social networks people started to organize digital protests. These activities included taking pictures of themselves with their hands up, since Brown put his hands up showing he was not a threat before he was shot and killed. People also took pictures of themselves mocking the portrayal of Brown as a teenage troublemaker in the media, asking which picture would be used if he or she was

killed by law enforcement.

Facilitating Online Actions is akin to the digital activism described by Bonilla and Rosa (2015). It is clear that Facilitating Online Actions goes far beyond sharing Personal Opinions or engaging in Discussion. Furthermore, Facilitating Online Actions is not positively correlated with Face-to-face Updates or Facilitating Face-to-Face Protests. Therefore, the people who are most concerned with face-to-face activities do not associate themselves with Facilitating Online Actions. This negative correlation suggests that facilitating Online Actions is a unique behavior exhibited by a specific type of digital activist. Further research is necessary to substantiate this claim.

5.7. Live Reporting from Face-To-Face Protests

The current study found a wealth of people posting live video and pictures in their Tweets as they participated in Tony Robinson

protests. Samples of Face-to-Face Updates as well as associated multimedia are presented below.

Additional studies also found that social media was used to post updates from demonstrations (Brym et al., 2014; Lim, 2012). Each of these studies makes a connection between live reporting and organizing using social media. A good example of how Face-to-Face Updates were used is the study conducted by Juris (2012) on the Occupy Wall Street movement. He found that when the city of Boston was trying to dismantle the protester's encampment activists got the word out on Twitter and people started to sing and dance in the streets until the city relented. Immediately word that the activists were victorious was sent out via Twitter. Indeed providing Face-to-face Updates is related to Facilitating Face-to-face Action as a positive correlation was found between these two study variables.

5.8. Facilitating Face-to-Face Protests



Madison is BEASTIN rn
HIGH SCHOOLERS DID THIS
#justice4tony #TonyRobinson
#BlackLivesMatter <http://t.co/L77yuXJJer>



Sheriff Mahoney joins students to demand #justice4tony #TonyRobinson
#BlackLivesMatter <http://t.co/uaJGIvUERH>

The current study found that direct efforts to organize people to participate in protests and other events were made before and during the events. Examples of some of these Tweets are provided below.

Tomorrow 10:30am, YWCA, strategy meeting. Show up Madison #TonyRobinson #BlackLivesMatter #FergusonToMadison

5PM Red Gym @UWMadison students come process and be together following the death of #tonyrobinson #blacklivesmatter

Other studies found that face-to-face protests had substantial online components that helped enable success on the ground (Brym et al., 2014; Harlow & Guo, 2014; Juris, 2012). For example, a study chronicling the use of social media to facilitate activism in Egypt conducted by Lim (2012) found that Facebook and Twitter were instrumental in the success of the social movements that started in 2004 with a small protest and ended with the massive uprising in 2011, led to the fall of President Mubarak. Lim (2012) reported that 50 out of 74 demonstrations that occurred in Egypt had a substantial online component that was instrumental in coordinating the demonstrations. #BlackLivesMatter is yet another digital activism success story that successfully uses social media to facilitate demonstrations.

6. Implications

Practitioners who conduct research in online communities can benefit from this study because the #BlackLivesMatter movement exemplifies several recommendations for creating an online community. A study of Occupy Wall Street on Twitter by Gleason (2013) established that informal learning occurs when participating in digital activism. The current study aligns with these findings as the Forwarding Information category

demonstrated #BlackLivesMatter contributors learned about the disempowerment of African Americans. In this case, Twitter was used in support of both digital and face-to-face activities. Therefore, it is recommended that practitioners consider using Twitter as an informal learning tool to support other educational activities. The current study also found that cohesive communities of learners can be formed from vast numbers of users, who are from different places, and whose communication is limited. To take advantage of such communities, it is recommended that practitioners provide opportunities for potential members to connect with one another according to shared interests or activities. Providing this opportunity will produce a cohesive and active online community, but of course not all members will participate actively. However, the current study demonstrated that even simple actions within Twitter constitute meaningful engagement. Therefore, a further recommendation for practitioners is to provide methods to share and favorite content in online courses to facilitate the ability of members to make meaningful contributions from the periphery (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Practitioners who heed these recommendations will be able to enhance online learning by creating cohesive communities that can support online learning as well as face-to-face activities.

7. Limitations and Future Research

The first limitation of this study is that an analysis of discussion within the #BlackLivesMatter network was not conducted. The OILS Twitter Scraper is currently not capable of capturing nested responses associated with Tweets. Future research should investigate the nature of the discussions that occur in the threaded discussions found within individual Tweets. The second limitation of this study is that only

the author was involved in creating the arrays used to assess whether a given Tweet fit into the seven study categories. Future research should involve additional coders to enhance the reliability of the Tweet classification. The final limitation of this study is that it focused on Tweets associated with both #BlackLivesMatter and #TonyRobinson. Twitter is a vast network and a variety of different hashtags were likely used by different groups during the Tony Robinson protests for related purposes. Future research should incorporate a larger number of hashtags and compare how the network of users behind the different hashtags uses them to organize.

8. Conclusion

The relationships established in this study suggest that digital activism actions are more complex than what has been described in previous research. In fact, it appears that the Forwarding Information and the Facilitating Online Activities categories represent unique types of digital activism. As described by Morozov (2013), there are two different types of digital activism: Activism and Slacktivism. Activism is defined as organizing tangible actions in the real world to protest against a given issue using social media. Slacktivism, a combination of the words slacker and activism, refers to people who engage in digital activism but never take their actions into the real world. According to these definitions, the difference between an Activist and a Slacktivist is participating in face-to-face protests. Empirical research has operationalized these definitions in a similar fashion generally painting Slacktivists in a negative light because they lack the conviction to participate in live protests (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Carew, 2014; Harlow & Guo, 2014). The current study demonstrates that within Slacktivism, the online actions of Forwarding Information and Facilitating Online Action

are quite different from one another. In fact, Forwarding Information is most closely associated with Slacktivism because it only involves clicking a button to share information and does not require high levels of engagement.

On the other hand, Facilitating Online Action involves a high level of engagement and often results in real-world impacts. For example, Kapin and Ward (2013) noted that even the simple action of Retweeting constitutes meaningful action because it is a way to maintain networks between live events. If such small actions done collectively can be meaningful, the Online Activists who facilitate online actions certainly have the potential to exert their influence. An extreme version of Facilitating Online Actions is described by Montgomery et al. (2004), who described how some groups have organized system overloads of websites and phone services. Overloading communication networks generally requires minimal individual effort as it often involves many people placing a call or sending an email at a given time. Indeed the level of societal impact between closing down streets for marching protesters and overloading a digital network rendering the Internet useless is comparable.

In conclusion, the current study identified that not all Slacktivists are created equal because within this group are people who share information or facilitate online actions. Although Slacktivists do not participate in face-to-face protests, the people who facilitate online actions are much more active and engaged than those who simply share information. This difference suggests the need to establish an additional type of digital activist as well as redefine the definition of a Slacktivist. A Slacktivist should be understood as someone who shares information online but does not contribute to either face-to-face protests or online protests. The new type of

activist, which shall be known as an Online Activist, is defined as an individual who helps facilitate tangible actions online. Digital activism continues to grow in popularity and research should focus on learning more about its dynamics before digital activism becomes the primary organizing method used to spark social change.

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Contact the Author

Damien Sánchez

University of New Mexico

Email: dmxs2g@unm.edu